

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 028 907

RE 001 710

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A Comparison of Children's Reading Performance Under Directed and Non-Directed Conditions.

Pub Date Apr 68

Note-5p.; Paper presented at International Reading Association conference, Boston, Mass., Apr. 24-27, 1968

EDRS Price MF-\$0.25 HC-\$0.35

Descriptors-\*Grade 4, \*Instructional Design, Interpretive Reading, Reading Achievement, \*Reading Comprehension, \*Reading Instruction

Children's reading performances under directed and nondirected conditions were compared in the case of 300 fourth-grade suburban students. Subjects were divided into high, middle, and low achievement groups of 100 each, and each group was subdivided into experimental and control groups. The directed conditions experimental group read the questions to be answered before reading the selection, and the nondirected reading control group had the regular format of the reading comprehension test in which the questions followed the paragraph. The Bond, Balow, Hoyt New Developmental Reading Test--Intermediate Level was used. On the Reading for Information subtest the nondirected control group scored significantly better than did the experimental group; however, that difference was only 3 months on a grade equivalent basis. This was true for all achievement groups. On the Reading for Appreciation subtest there were no significant differences between the experimental and control groups on either of the subtests used, but there were significant differences between the achievement groups of both subtests. It is suggested that further research be done on the efficacy of prior questions to direct pupils' reading for comprehension. (CM)

**A Comparison of Children's Reading Performance  
Under Directed and Non-Directed Conditions.**

**Purpose:**

This study was designed to compare children's reading performance under directed and non-directed conditions. Directed conditions meant that the children had the questions to be answered presented before the reading selections, while under the non-directed reading condition, the children had the regular format of the reading comprehension test in which the questions to be answered followed the reading paragraphs.

**Background:**

Most of the basal reading series for grades four, five, six, which are used in public schools at the present time recommend that the teacher direct the students reading by providing questions which the student uses as a guide for comprehension of the material to be read. (Russell, 1961), (Harris, 1961), (Dechant, 1964), and (Smith, 1962) all recommend that the directed reading process for improving reading comprehension in the elementary grades. There are several studies which indicate that directed reading, using questions to be answered placed before the reading matter, is beneficial to the reading performance of college students and adults (Holmes, 1931), (Washburne, 1929.) Yet, in an extensive review of the literature in this area, this investigator found no study published which shows that directed reading actually does improve reading comprehension of elementary school children. Practically, what this means that although most basal texts used in elementary school advocate directed reading, there have been

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few, if any, studies using elementary school children which yield any information on the usefulness of directed reading in the elementary school. It was this obvious gap in our knowledge of the reading spectrum which motivated this study.

**Sample:**

All fourth grade students from four randomly selected elementary schools in Independent School District, number 621, Minnesota, were used as the sample. From the original sample, 300 students were randomly selected to be the subjects of this study.

**Procedure:**

Data on achievement in reading were collected from scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and these scores were used to establish three reading achievement groups (High, Middle, Low) consisting of 100 children each. These three achievement groups, were then randomly sub-divided into experimental and control groups, with the experimental groups under the directed conditions and the control groups under the non-directed conditions. The reading comprehension test used in the treatment portion of this study was the Bond, Balow, Hoyt New Developmental Reading Tests - Intermediate Level.

With the assistance of graduate students at the University of Minnesota, the investigator tested all of the children in the study during the morning hours of one day. The investigator scored all of the tests and the data were analyzed by means of an UMSTAT 6600 program.

**Results:**

The results of the study basically were:

1. On the subtest Reading for Information, the control group, non-directed reading conditions, scored significantly better than

did the experimental group. This result was true for all three achievement groups.

2. On the subtest Reading for Appreciation, there were no significant differences between the experimental and control groups, either overall or among the separate achievement groups.
3. There was no interaction between the achievement groups on either of the subtests used.
4. There were significant differences between the achievement groups on both subtests, as would be expected.

#### Cautions In Interpreting the Results:

The results in this study are subject to several limitations which require that interpretations be made cautiously.

1. The sample was drawn from a suburban school district which is above average in several respects. For example, the average fourth grade child in the school district is reading at fifth grade level.
2. The validity of findings depends on the reliability and validity of the instruments used. Some factors investigated were defined by the measuring instruments.
3. A final caution is that the children were tested with a standardized test and whether their performance on this test and their performance in their own classroom under non-test conditions is comparable is a moot point.

#### Conclusions:

The following conclusions to be drawn must be evaluated with the knowledge of the above mentioned limitations.

1. On the Reading for Information subtest children who were under the non-directed conditions seem to comprehend more than children who read under the directed reading condition. The difference in

performance was statistically significant.

Three different reading achievement levels were not discriminating factors in the analysis of the data. On all three reading achievement levels, the non-directed readers performed better than the directed readers and there was no interaction between reading achievement groups.

2. On the subtest, Reading for Appreciation, there were no significant differences between children who read under directed conditions, and those who read under non-directed conditions although the directed readers scored slightly higher than did the non-directed readers.

A tentative hypothesis based on the fact that the non-directed readers did significantly better on the Reading for Information subtests and yet slightly worse on the Reading for Appreciation subtest is that when the child does not have to read the question twice while looking for specific information he scores better than his counterpart who must read the questions to be answered both before and after reading the passage. However, when the task required is not one of obtaining specific information from the passage, but rather one of literary evaluation and sensory impression of the passage read, the non-directed reader scores approximately the same as the directed reader.

3. A final conclusion is that although a statistically significant difference was found in the performance of the children on the Reading for Information subtest, that difference is only three months on a grade equivalent basis and therefore does not seem to be a practical difference of consequence in the classroom.

### Educational Implications:

The implication for education which emerges from this study is that directed reading, which is commonly stressed in professional texts, may not be as beneficial as previously believed. Questions before the selection to be read seem to be slowing the students reading rate considerably and yet do not provide the student with the tools to increase his reading comprehension. To the extent that this study approximates the directed reading procedure in the classroom, encouragement to teachers to carefully direct children's reading for comprehension appears misguided.

It is to be hoped that this study will lead to other investigations of the same question. If further research should also cast serious doubt on the efficacy of prior questions to direct pupils reading for comprehension, adjustments in teaching method would be in order. However, the present study is too limited in scope to do more than raise a cautionary signal about a heretofore largely unchallenged pedagogical assumption.